

Hardaway-Wilson House
("Georgia Cottage")
2564 Springhill Avenue
Mobile
Mobile County
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-826

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49-MOB, 133-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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HARDAWAY-WILSON HOUSE ("GEORGIA COTTAGE")

Location: 2564 Springhill Avenue, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

Present Owner: Mrs. Mary Frank Sturdivant Sledge

Present Occupant: Same

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: Originally a country house, this large "Creole" cottage is one of the finest existing examples of its type and is historically significant, as it was, from 1857 to 1868, the home of Augusta Evans Wilson, noted Southern authoress.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1840
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: The house was constructed in 1840 by Colonel John Murrell from Georgia on twenty acres of land that was part of a Spanish land grant. Colonel Murrell built the house for his daughter, who had married William A. Hardaway, and she owned the house until 1855, when it was sold to Alfred Batre. In 1857, Augusta Evans, later Augusta Evans Wilson, purchased the property in her father's name, Matthew R. Evans. The Evans family occupied the house until 1879, when it was sold to Andrew Damrell. In 1926, J.N. Brownlee purchased the property from Damrell's heirs and sold it in 1935 to Dr. Edward Simmons Sledge, whose widow has maintained the property until the present day.
4. Builder or contractor: The house was constructed by slave labor brought from Georgia by Colonel John Murrell.
5. Alterations and additions: Minor additions have been made on the rear of the house at various times to provide modern kitchens and bathrooms, but the remainder of the house has remained substantially unchanged since it was constructed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Augusta Evans Wilson, famed Southern authoress, was born in Columbus, Georgia, on May 8, 1835. Having spent four years in San Antonio, the Evans family, which had suffered severe financial reverses, moved to Mobile in 1849. On the basis of her experiences in Texas, the young writer began her first book, Inez. A Tale of the Alamo, shortly after coming to

Mobile and presented the finished manuscript to her father on Christmas day of 1854. Published in the following year, the proceeds from this book enabled Augusta to purchase "Georgia Cottage" for her father in 1857. Nationwide acclaim followed soon after, when, in 1859, Beulah was published and sold 22,000 copies in nine months. During the time that she lived at "Georgia Cottage", Augusta Evans wrote two of her most famous novels, Macaria and St. Elmo. Macaria was smuggled through the blockade and published on wall paper in Richmond in 1864. The Confederate novel created so much sympathy among Union troops that General Grant ordered it confiscated and burned, and only two of the original copies are known to have survived. During the Civil War, a camp for training soldiers was established near her home, and Augusta established a hospital in a vacant house and nursed the sick and wounded. The hospital was named "Camp Beulah" in her behalf and later, General Beauregard, who had issued the order to fire on Fort Sumter, presented her with his personal pen. Augusta Evans was married in 1868 to Colonel L. M. Wilson in the parlor of "Georgia Cottage". Until 1891, when her husband died, she resided at "Ashland Place". The remainder of her life was spent in her brother's home on Government Street; she continued writing, and two years before her death in 1909, the last book, Re-vote, was published, marking the end of a literary career that had made Augusta Evans Wilson the first woman in America to earn more than \$100,000.00 from her writings.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Lewis Troost Map (c. 1840), City Hall, Mobile

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division, Mobile County

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Authoress' Home Open on Calvacade of Homes", Mobile Press Register, November 7, 1965, p. 2-D.

Nineteenth-Century Mobile Architecture. An Inventory of Existing Buildings, Mobile: Mobile City Planning Commission, (unpublished manuscript to be published in 1972).

Prepared by Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
August 28, 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

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A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a fine example of the basic "Creole" cottage, enlarged by the addition of equal side wings and enhanced by decorative elements in the Greek-Revival style.
2. Condition of fabric: The house has been well-maintained and is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This is a one-story house with a rectangular main section and equal side wings. The facade of the main section measures 54'-8" (five bays), and each of the wings has a three-bay facade measuring 18'-3". The over-all depth is 64'-0", including the front gallery.
2. Foundations: The house rests on brick piers that have vented brick fills between the piers on the perimeter of the building.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The frame construction has clapboarding painted white. The south front walls, on the galleries of the main section and wings, consist of plastered tongue-and-groove boards painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: Floor framing consists of approximately 8" x 8" beams and 2" x 10" joists with an average spacing of 2'-0". The roof framing was not accessible.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: The south fronts of the main section and each of the wings have separate galleries consisting of Tuscan posts supporting a simplified entablature with a plain frieze, moulded cornice, and narrow overhanging eaves. Wooden railings with simple square balusters stretch between the posts and access to each gallery is gained by a short flight of steps with railings in each of the center bays. A pilaster at each end of the galleries responds to the corner posts and continues around the angle, thus articulating the corners on each front. A rear gallery on the main section was originally identical to that on the front, but has now been partially enclosed with the additions of kitchens and bathrooms. A section of the rear gallery floor is hinged and raises to give access to a small wine and food cellar.
6. Chimneys: There are two interior brick chimneys on both the east and west walls of the main section, and one on the original north walls of each wing. (With the additions of kitchens on the rear of the wings, the original exterior north walls are no longer exposed.)

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance in the center bay of the south facade (main section) is framed by Tuscan pilasters supporting a simplified entablature. Within the frame is a door with two vertical glazed panels (originally solid) flanked by Tuscan posts supporting a heavy transom bar and sidelights of three glazed panels above a wooden panel. The transom consists of seven lights. The doorways in the center bays of the wings have plain frames with a simple moulded cornice and a three-light transom over a solid two-panel (vertical) door.
- b. Windows and shutters: All windows have plain frames with a simple cornice that suggests the elements of an entablature, and all have double-hung wooden sash with six-over-six lights. The floor-length openings on the gallery of the main section have hinged wooden panels below the sash. All windows are equipped with adjustable wooden louvered shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main section and wings have hipped roofs that extend over the galleries. The original cypress shingles are still in place, although they are now covered with asbestos shingles. The present owner states that the latter replaced sheets of tin.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a continuous simple entablature with a plain frieze, moulded cornice, and narrow overhanging eaves with plain soffits.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The house has a balanced center hall plan with two rooms on either side of the hall in the main section and one room in each of the side wings. Bathrooms and kitchens have been added on the rear of the wings and part of the rear gallery has been enclosed. The two rooms on the east side are separated by large sliding doors; the west rooms are separated by a doorway, and a modern bathroom has been added, making the present northwest room smaller. The center hall was originally equipped with a set of hinged and louvered shutter doors approximately 10'-0" high which, when closed, separated the front from the rear. A small room on the rear of the northeast room of the main section is the original

pantry, indicating that the east rooms were planned as a parlor and dining room, and not as a double parlor. ALA
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2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: Floors consist of random-width tongue-and-groove pine boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are plaster on hand-split laths. The original plaster remains in several of the rooms and is made of pig's hair, sand, and pulverized oyster shells.
5. Doorways and doors: Doorways and windows are framed by eared architrave mouldings with wide batters and pointed cornices. All doors have six panels except that leading from the hall to the rear gallery, which has four panels with the top two panels glazed.
6. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: All rooms have moulded 12" wooden baseboards and simple plaster crown and ceiling mouldings. The hall ceiling has a plain medallion formed by a circular plaster moulding. The pantry contains the original wooden cabinets that have hinged doors made of wide beaded tongue-and-groove boards with horizontal braces on the inside.
7. Notable hardware: The original silver-plated knobs and key-hole covers are in place on the interior doors. The exterior doors at the front and rear of the center hall also have large silver-plated sliding bolts.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Each of the six main rooms is equipped with a fireplace that originally burned wood. Some of the fireplaces now have cast-iron coal grates. Mantlepieces are wooden and almost identical, except that there are slight variations in the design of the pilasters that support the mantles. Central heating has also been installed in the floors.
 - b. Lighting: Electricity was installed in the house by the present owner in 1935. The house had never been piped for gas, and the gas chandeliers which are now found in the parlor and dining room are not original to the house. The whale oil chandelier in the hall is also not original.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south on Springhill Avenue between Wingfield Drive and Sienna Vista Street, set back approximately 100 yards from the road.

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2. Landscaping: A magnificent avenue of live oaks planted c. 1840 leads from Springhill Avenue to the house. A crushed shell drive between the trees is lined with azaleas, makes a circle in front of the house, and continues around the west side to the rear. On the six acres remaining of the original twenty-acre lot, there are still found many of the original plantings, including cucumber and frascatti magnolia trees, sweet olive trees, and four varieties of camelias. An original variety of camelias was developed by Augusta Evans Wilson on the property and bears her name.
3. Outbuildings: There were originally four slave houses, a barn, and an unattached kitchen on the property, but none of these remain. A modern garage is now located at the rear, near the site of the old kitchen.

Prepared by Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a result of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission. Jack E. Boucher, HABS photographer, was sent to Mobile in 1963 to photograph designated buildings, and Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, compiled the historical and architectural data during the summer of 1972.